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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Designates Critical Habitat for Four Southwest Aquatic Invertebrates

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today in the Federal Register the designation of critical habitat for the Pecos assimineia (*Assiminea pecos*), Roswell springsnail (*Pyrgulopsis roswellensis*), Koster's springsnail (*Juturnia kosteri*), and Noel's amphipod (*Gammarus desperatus*), under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. In total, the Service is designating as critical habitat approximately 521.3 acres (211.0 hectares) for the four species of aquatic invertebrates. The critical habitat is located in Chaves County, New Mexico, and Pecos and Reeves Counties, Texas.

This final rule and the associated final economic analysis and final environmental assessment are available on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> or <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/NewMexico/>.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Critical habitat designation provides for the conservation of threatened and endangered species in several ways. Specifying the location of habitat essential for the conservation of the species helps Federal agencies identify where to utilize their authorities to benefit the species as required by the ESA. Designating critical habitat also helps focus the conservation efforts of other conservation partners, such as State and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. Critical habitat also provides conservation planning guidance to bridge the gap until the Service can complete more thorough recovery planning.

In addition to serving as a notification tool, the designation of critical habitat also provides significant regulatory protection for threatened and endangered species – the requirement that federal agencies consult with the Service to ensure actions they fund, authorize or carry out are not likely to destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. Protection afforded to listed species by the ESA also conveys significant protection to the habitat they occupy, regardless of whether that habitat has been formally designated as critical habitat.

Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge or preserve. In general, a critical habitat designation has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

The health of threatened and endangered species is strongly linked to our own well-being. Millions of Americans depend on habitat that sustains these species – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods. By taking action to protect the habitat of imperiled native fish, wildlife and plants, we can ensure a healthy future for our community.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works cooperatively with the American public to continue the conservation legacy of America's great outdoors. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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